



ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

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INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

This pamphlet had been compiled by the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office to offer some helpful insights and suggestions for the families we serve.

MISSION

It is the mission of the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office to serve the public in a professional, confidential and courteous manner in the medico-legal investigation of deaths in western NY counties, thereby enhancing our understanding of death and dying. Our objectives are to work diligently to determine the cause and manner of death of our constituents, and to convey those findings in a timely fashion to families and to such agencies in the health and legal communities that have ongoing concerns related to the deceased and their survivors.

What is the function of the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office?

A Medical Examiner's Office is a medicolegal office charged by state law to investigate certain deaths.

Which deaths fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner?

The medical examiner is required by New York State County Law Article 17-A (section 673) to examine and investigate deaths that:

- appear to be violent – e.g. motor vehicle accident, industrial accident, fall, homicide, etc.
- are caused by an unlawful act or criminal neglect
- are suspicious or unexplained
- are unattended by a physician or no physician is able to certify the cause of death
- are of a person confined in a public institution other than a hospital, infirmary or nursing home

Will an examination be performed by the medical examiner?

The medical examiner will determine to what extent an examination is necessary to determine cause and manner of death. The decedent may be examined externally and/or internally.

Is family consent needed for an examination to be performed?

No. Examinations (when deemed necessary by the medical examiner) do not require consent from next-of-kin.

What does cause of death mean?

The cause of death is the disease or injury responsible for initiating the lethal sequence of events.

What does manner of death mean?

The manner of death describes the circumstances surrounding the death. The manner of death is classified into one of the following:

- natural
- accident
- homicide
- suicide
- undetermined
- investigation pending (until cause and manner of death have been determined)

If a death appears natural, why is the medical examiner involved?

The Erie County Medical Examiner's Office has jurisdiction when:

- the death was unexpected and no medical cause of death can be determined
- when the decedent was not under the care of a physician
- when a death might be due to something considered a public health hazard
- when a private doctor will not sign the death certificate

Will organ or tissue donation be possible if a case is accepted by the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office?

The Medical Examiner's Office supports efforts to promote organ and tissue donation.

Can there be an open casket after an examination?

An examination *does not* disfigure the decedent in any way that will prevent the family from having an open casket; however the circumstances surrounding the death must be taken into consideration.

After the examination, how are arrangements made for the release of the decedent?

The funeral director, chosen by the family, will contact the Medical Examiner's Office and make all the necessary arrangements for the release of the decedent and transport to the funeral home. The decedent will be released after the examination is complete.

What happens to personal property of the deceased?

Personal property is inventoried and given to the funeral director to give to the family member making the arrangements. In some cases, the police will secure the property.

Why is a death certificate necessary?

A death certificate is needed to bury/cremate remains, claim insurance, receive government benefits, settle estates and pursue any civil or criminal legal actions.

Can death certificates be obtained from the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office?

No, the original death certificate is filed by the funeral director in the Registrars Office respective to where the decedent passed away. Next of kin and others legally entitled to them may obtain them from the Registrar's Office in the city/village/town where the death occurred or from the funeral director at a cost of \$10 each. More information can be obtained through New York State Vital Statistics at 1-877-854-4481 or http://www.health.state.ny.us/vital_records/.

What does it mean if the death certificate reads pending investigation?

"Pending Investigation" means that the case is incomplete and additional work and investigation is necessary. The decedent can still be released and arrangements made. This will be amended when the investigation is complete and the final cause and manner of death have been determined.

Who may obtain a copy of the examination report?

Pursuant to county law section 677, records are available to:

- the District Attorney of the County;
- the personal representative, spouse, child (over 18 years old), sibling, grandparent;
- upon proper application of any person who is or may be affected in a civil or criminal action by the contents of the record of any investigation, an order may be made by a court of record, or by a justice of the Supreme Court, that the record of that investigation be made available for his/her inspection, or that a transcript there be furnished to him/her, or both

How do I obtain a copy of the examination report and is there a cost?

An examination report may be obtained by next-of-kin (spouse, parent, child, grandparent) at no cost by completing the Examination Request form (page 6) in its entirety.

All others/non-relations (lawyers, insurance companies, etc.) will need a HIPAA release or judicial court order and a \$38.50 check payable to the Erie County Medical Examiner.

How long does it take to obtain an examination report?

The length of time varies from case to case. After an examination is performed it generally takes up to 120 days for the final report. Complicated cases may take several months.

Can a neighbor call up and find out information about a death?

Information is strictly confidential and not a matter of public record.

Where is the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office located?

The office is located at **501 Kensington Ave, Buffalo, NY 14214** on the campus of the Erie County Medical Center.

Are support groups available to help our family?

This is a difficult time and resources are available in the community. A list of community agencies that offer support is attached or you may go online to:

http://www.erie.gov/depts/seniorservices/caregiving/caregiver_groups.asp. There are many decisions to be made and people are available to assist you.

What needs to be done when a loved one dies?

1. When you are notified of a death, call a friend, family member and/or clergy member for support.
2. Select a funeral home to assist you with preparations. Check with friends, neighbors or your local phone book for your selection.
3. Remember, the funeral home will contact the Medical Examiner's office and take care of the release of the decedent.
4. Start a list and a file with information given to you and the names and phone numbers of the people you will be talking with.
5. Remember to try to eat something and try to rest. Let your family and friends help you!

*The staff at the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office hopes this information will be useful to you. Please contact the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office at **(716) 961-7591** if you have additional concerns that have not been addressed.*

How to Dispose of Medications

Syringe/Medical Waste and Un-needed Medication Community Disposal Dual Kiosk Sites in Erie County

ERIE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

South Campus (Lobby - Student Loans)

4041 Southwestern Boulevard
Orchard Park, NY 14127
716-858-2903

City Campus (Lobby)

121 Ellicott Street
Buffalo, NY 14203
716-858-2903

North Campus (Lobby - Pub. Safety Bldg.)

6205 Main Street
Williamsville, NY 14221
716-858-2903

SUNY BUFFALO

Bissell Hall - North Campus
Buffalo, NY 14260
716-645-2229

MEDAILLE COLLEGE

(Lobby of Pub. Safety Bldg.)
18 Agassiz Circle
Buffalo, NY 14214
716-880-2237

CANISIUS COLLEGE

(Bosch Building, Lobby of Pub. Security Bldg.)
2001 Main St
Buffalo, NY 14208
716-888-3197

ERIE COUNTY PUBLIC LOCATIONS

Erie County Sheriff's Office

10 Delaware Ave. (Lobby)
Buffalo, NY 14202
716-858-6305

Grand Island Town Hall

2255 Baseline Road (Lobby)
Grand Island, NY 14072
716-773-9600

Colden Town Hall

8812 State Road (Town Hall Lobby)
Colden, NY 14033
716-941-5012

Clarence Town Hall

1 Town Place (Town Hall Lobby)
Clarence, NY 14031
716-741-8938

Elma Town Hall

116 Bowen Road (Town Hall Lobby)
Elma, NY 14059
716-652-3260

Springville Town Hall

65 Franklin Street (Sheriff's Substation)
Springville, NY 14141
716-592-4936

The kiosks are available 24/7 with no questions asked.

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TRAUMA SCENE WASTE MANAGEMENT

Action Bio-Care

24 Hour 1-877-493-4605
www.actionbiocare.com

Advanced Bio-Treatment

Professional Trauma Scene Cleaning
24 Hour Emergency Dispatch
3 Hour response time
Mailing Center
213 Foothills Dr.
Murrayville, GA 30564
24 Hour 1-800-860-4268
www.advancedbio-treatment.com

Aftermath, Inc.

24 Hour Emergency Dispatch
1-800-366-9923
www.aftermathinc.com

Crime Scene Clean-Up

24 Hour Hotline
1-800-295-5460
www.crimesceneclean-up.com

Crime & Trauma Scene Eraser

131 Burke Dr.
Cheektowaga, NY 14215
24 Hour (716) 835-1393, 361-2824
www.erase-it.org
steven_mcilwain@yahoo.com

Enviro-Care, Inc.

Disaster Restoration Services
14 Roberts Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14206
(716) 826-6970
Fax (716) 826-6975
1-800-875-6970

Kleen Scene

Crime and Death Scene Recovery
Biohazardous Cleaning Services
52 Miriam Ave.
Blasdell, NY 14219
24 Hour (716) 440-8071
www.kleenscene.com
info@kleenscene.com

Bio-Recovery Services of WNY

24 Hour Discreet Response
716-796-8329
Hamburg, NY 14075

SERVPRO

Biohazard and Fire & Water –
Cleanup & Restoration
Servpro.com
Post Office Box 42
North Tonawanda, NY 14120-0042
24 Hour (716) 694-SPRO (7776)

Spotless Touch Crime Scene Cleaners

Crime, Unattended & Death Cleanup
P.O. Box 425
Buffalo, NY 14207
(716) 563-2051
24 Hour Emergency Dispatch
www.cscleaners.com
info@cscleaners.com

Stratus Building Solutions

1780 Wehrle Drive, Suite 102
Williamsville, New York 14221
716-810-0200
www.stratusclean.com

Grief Support Services

Grief Support Group
(Life Transition Ctr.)
150 Bennett Road
Cheektowaga, NY 14215
836-6460

Grief Support Group
370 John James Audubon Pkwy
Amherst, NY 14228
636-3050

MADD
Erie County Chapter
3959 N. Buffalo Road
Orchard Park, NY 14127

Crisis Services
2969 Main Street
Buffalo, NY
834-2531

Jewish Family Service of Buffalo and Erie County
70 Barker Street
Buffalo, NY
883-1914

Sudden Infant and Child Death Resource Center
Family Help Center
60 Dingens Street
Buffalo, NY 14206
822-0919

Mental Health Association of Erie County
999 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14209
886-1242

Alcohol and Drug Dependency Services
920 Harlem Road
West Seneca, NY 14224
821-0391



COUNTY OF ERIE

EXAMINATION REPORT REQUEST

MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE
501 KENSINGTON AVE.
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14214
Phone 716-961-7591

Examination reports may be requested by immediate next-of-kin. All requests must be notarized and mailed to the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office at the above address. Faxed, e-mailed or copied requests will not be accepted. Reports will be mailed to the address provided below.

Date: _____

I, _____, am requesting a copy of the
Print Name

Examination Report from the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office for

_____ who passed away on _____.
Deceased's Name Date

My relationship to the deceased is: _____

Signature

Report to be mailed to: _____
Address

City, State, Zip

Phone #

Notary use only below this line

STATE OF _____

COUNTY OF _____

Sworn to me on this _____ day of _____, in the year 20 ____

Notary Public Printed Name: _____

My Commission Expires: _____